

Plain-Dealing

Concerning the

Penal Laws and Tests.

Delivered in a DIALOGUE between a
Country-man and a Citizen.

By one that heartily desires the Prosperity of His Majesty, and all sorts of His Majesties Subjects: Who is a Protestant Dissenter, and hath been an old Sufferer.

Countryman.

SIR, I am heartily glad to see you, and having this good opportunity, I must make bold to intreat you to give me the best account of Affairs you can, respecting the publick Welfare of the City, and also of the whole Kingdom, because you in this great City are best able to Inform and Instruct the Country about matters that relate to the Welfare of all sorts of his Majesties Subjects, by reason of your serious and frequent Converse with men of good Reason, and such as have considered and debated the Common Good better than we poor Country Folks, that live a great many Miles from one another.

Citizen. My very good Friend, I am as glad as you of this opportunity, to have some Friendly Converse with you about the matters you propose; and the more glad, because we can now freely Discourse, so as to mention the *King* and the *Kingdom* without being afraid of those, that if they should formerly have heard *King* and *Kingdom* mentioned, were ready to think there was something against the Government.

Countr. In truth Sir, it hath been so in the Country; and we have been fain to keep our Mouths as if a Pad-lock had been upon them, for fear our Words should be mis-interpreted, when God knows, we intended no hurt at all: But we were *Nonconformists*.

Citt. I will tell ye the reason of that, it was because you, as well as wee, did live among a sort of men who concluded Infalibly that there was no true Loyalty to the *King* amongst those that were for *Nonconformity* to the *Church*, as it was *Established by Law*.

Countr. I think you hit the matter very well; only I must tell you
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that many who were true Sons of the *Church*, and did pity and favour the *Nonconformists* as much as they could, were basely Brow-beaten, and brought into many troubles, because they did esteem their Dissenting Neighbours to be good Subjects to the King, though they differed in some matters of Religion from the *Established Church*. But no more of that at present; pray let me have an Account how things are now, and how they are like to be, concerning matters of Religion.

Cit. Truly it is now a happy time in our City, thanks be to God and the King, for now Ministers and People can meet together publicly and peaceably, without fear of being dogged by Informers at their going or coming from their several Meetings; now instead of fearing a Justice should know of their Meetings, they may boldly tell such who they are, and where they are to meet, and expect protection from those Justices: now when we have heard the good word of God, to the comfort of our Souls, we can go home and rejoyce in God, without fear of having our Houses broken open, and our Goods taken away the Week after: Now our Streets are in Peace and Quiet upon the Lords Day, from the hurry of the Trained-Bands, that did use to run to and fro with Constables and Informers to break open the Houses of good Cittizens; and if they found any number of People above five, besides the Family, they were forced away before the Lord Mayor, or some other Magistrate, though they could not prove any Religious Worship amongst them; and then they were bound over to the Sessions, and Indicted for *Riots* or *Routs*, though the whole City did very well know they were as peaceable Subjects as any the King had. And besides all this, great Violence was Exercised in breaking to pieces the *Pulpits* and *Seats* and *Galleries* of many *Publick Meeting-Places*. And one Justice of the Peace, instead of keeping the Kings Peace, upon the Lords Day after the publick Services of the Church of England was done, he got a company of men and went to an *Anabaptist Meeting-Place*, and broke open the Doors when there was no People in the place, and then broke the Seats to pieces, and caused them to be carryed into the Street and made an Amazing Bonfire. And now also we are delivered from those Excommunications which kept many honest Men so long time in Prison, and cost others such vast sums of Money to keep out.

Countr. Unto all this I will add a few Words: Now we also are not disturbed with Prosecutions at the Assizes and Sessions, at the rate of 20 Pound a Month for not coming to Common-Prayer; And now our worthy Ministers, who were prohibited from living within five miles of a Corporation, can live and have great Meetings in any Corporation.

Cit. What cause have we in the City, and you in the Country, to praise

praise our God; and to love and honour the King as an Instrument in the Hand of God for so great a good !

Countr. Now you mention *thanking of the King*, I remember an Address of Thanks was much talked of in the Country, which was presented to his Majesty at *Hampton-Court*, by some *Anabaptists* in the City of *London*; and there was a deadly Ding about it; and the more, because it was done by *Anabaptists*: It was thanks for his Majesties Gracious Proclamation of Pardon, whereby a multitude of Men in the Rebellion of the *West* were Pardoned; and many *Dissenters* were delivered out of Prison, and from other Prosecutions; and there was no small Joy that it was not put in the *Gazet*, concluding from thence that the King slighted both the *Address* and the *Addressors*. And soon after his Majesties Gracious Declaration for *Liberty of Conscience*, the same *Anabaptists* delivered an Address of Thanks for that, and an heavy stir was begun about that; but when it was seen in the *Gazet*, then there was a little hush, concluding others would follow; and I think they have done pretty well, and I am glad of it.

Citt. Truly, a great deal of what you say was very much Discourged in this great City; but when considerate men had well weighed the great Provocations his Majestie met with by those strivings in Parliament, to keep him from the Throne by the Bill of Exclusion; and also that Provocation given by the Invasion and Rebellion of the Duke of *Monmouth* and his Party, to remove him from the Throne; and that after all this, his Majesty should put forth such a Gracious Proclamation of Pardon for the former Offenders; and in that Proclamation relieve a vast multitude of *Dissenters* from Prosecutions they were under by divers *Penal Laws*; and after that, to send forth such a Gracious Declaration for a *free and full Liberty of Conscience* to all sorts of his Subjects, both those differing from himself, and those of his perswasion. I say this hath convinced multitudes, and hath made them Cordial in their thankful Acknowledgments.

Countr. In truth you say a great deal; and I think his Majesties Royal Grace, all things considered, is to be greatly admired: And between you and I, some of *Monmouths* Party have said, If they had thought his Majesty would have been so Gracious a Prince, they would never have lift up a Hand against him; but they did verily believe he would in time have destroyed all sorts of Protestants, and they bless God they find they are mistaken. But still there be some keep up that old saying, *There is a Snake in the Grass*; and quoth they, *Can you tell how long this Happiness will continue?* And others put in their Verdict, and say, So far as any sorts of Protestant Dissenters are made use of to carry on the design of a *General Liberty of Conscience*, they are but *Scaffolds* to pull down the *Church of England*, and

set up the Church of *Rome*: What say you to this, Man?

Curr. Honest Friend, you talk like a Country-man; for you put too many things together; but seeing you are so free and friendly, I will answer them as well as I can:

1. As for the *Snake in the Grass*, I look upon it like the fancy of *Raw-head and Bloody-bones*, often mentioned to little Children to fright them when they are froward, though there be no such thing. But pray let us not forget the *Serpent* and the *Viper* that is seen and felt in the Bosoms of thousands of Families; I mean the *Penal Laws about matters of Conscience*: I wonder that an unseen Snake should be more terrible, than a multitude of fiery Serpents that bite and sting in every Country, City, Corporation, Town and Parish throughout the Kingdom, according as they may be let loose by Authority.

2. As for that Query, How long will this happiness continue? His Majesty hath resolved that in his Gracious Declaration, and divers times since, as he hath had occasion to speak unto his Addressing Subjects, that it shall not be in the power of one sort of his Subjects to hurt the others about matters of Conscience, respecting Religious Worship, as long as his Reign doth continue; and I think we have all cause to pray, God grant it may be long: For as long as he is High-Constable of the whole Kingdom, he is able to keep the Peace among all his People, so as to restrain them from offering Violence to each other.

3. As for the Dissenters being used as *Scaffolds* to pull down the Church of England, and build up the Church of *Rome*: This is an ugly Reflection upon our great Master-Builder, together with those brave Workmen he doth intend to have assisting in this Glorious Work, in Repairing and Amending the State of the Kingdom: To be plain, I mean the King, Lords and Commons Assembled in Parliament; for the Scaring Things before insinuated, cannot be done without them: And as for his Majesty, he hath declared enough concerning the Security of the Church of England, their Religion, Riches and Dignity, to be farther confirmed to them, when the *Penal Laws* and *Tests* are Repealed; he only restrains them from forcing Roman Catholics and Protestant Dissenters to their Churches, or sending of them to Goals, and Ruining of them in their Estates; his Majesty is not for Ruining the Building of the Church of England, but for Repairing of it, by removing some loose Topping-stones, that upon every strong Wind of Persecution fall down, to the hurt of those that Walk by the outside of her Walls; and as for Building up the Church of *Rome* by such Gracious Proceedings, in Concurrence with the Wisdom of a Parliament, I wonder such a Notion should be promoted; especially in calling the Dissenters the *Scaffolds* upon whom this work is to be effected, because they are diligent in promoting a general Liberty

of Conscience ; whereas it is well known that *all sorts* of Dissenters are farther in their separation from the *Church of Rome*, than they are from the *Church of England* ; and therefore nothing of such a Work can be designedly done by them. And besides all this, his Majesty in his Gracious Declaration hath made it evident, that he desires nothing else, but that those of his Own Perswasion, with all others of his Peaceable Subjects, may be at ease from Violence about their differing ways of Worshipping God. And I beseech you, consider well what I shall now say to you, That if the *Common-Prayer-men* had been under such Prosecutions by any other party that might have had power in their hands, they would have thought it a great Mercy to have such Relief offered them, as is now done by his Gracious Majesty ; and would have given thanks at a better rate ; And I pray God they may never be under such oppressions as Roman Catholicks and Protestant Dissenters have been, meerly for matters of Conscience, which his Majesty hath Graciously said *ought not to be forced*.

Countr. I am very glad of this friendly Converse ; and you have fairly led me to another great point, about which People are almost distracted, by being influenced from one and another Party : To be plain, I mean the *TEST*, which you mentioned just now : Pray be free with me, for I want some help ; because it is with great confidence affirmed, *That if the Test is taken away by Parliament, the whole Protestant Interest is ruined*.

Citt. I will be free and faithful in answering this matter according to my Capacity : Briefly thus ;

There is a *Test* that doth prohibit all *Roman Catholicks* from being in any Place of Trust or Profit, except they take it, which is to Renounce their Religion ; and I think this a very *hard Case*, that any Man should be made incapable to serve his Prince, and be in a way to get a Livelihood, except he wound his Conscience. And the same may be said concerning *Protestant Dissenters*, for none of them can be in these Employments, except they take the *Oath of Allegiance and Supremacy*, and the *Sacrament* of the Church of *England*. Now consider this matter ; some *Dissenters* can take the Oaths of *Allegiance and Supremacy*, but some cannot take either of them, and have suffered very deeply for refusing them : and those that can take both (supposing they understand the meaning thereof, better than those that refuse, yet they) cannot take the *Sacrament* ; and so the King is deprived of the Service of his faithful Subjects, of all sorts differing from the Church of *England*, because a dreadful Law in the Penalties of one part or other of it may fall upon them all. And now, my good Friend, consider things well : Suppose the King were an *Anabaptist*, *Independant*, *Presbyterian*, or *Quaker*, would it not be a sad thing

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thing that he should be unable to help his own Friends? And especially when he should be willing to have the Benefit of all sorts of his Subjects, that are capable by their Wisdom and Honesty, to contribute to the Welfare of the Publick; and besides all this, things did rise so high in oppressing the Kings faithful Subjects about five years ago, that many *good House-keepers* in the City of London, whose Livelihood depended upon selling *Ale and Beer*, could not have *License* so to do, without they brought a Certificate from their Parish-Minister and Church-Wardens, that they had taken the *Sacrament* of the *Church of England*; and so the holy *Sacrament* was made a *Test* to sell Drink for a Livelihood, as other things were made *Tests* for Offices.

Countr. Verily, if these things were well discoursed in the Country, by such as are of capacity to handle them, it would do much good; and I assure you I will do my part as well as I can: And this I must tell you, That there be many hundreds of Officers in the Country, in several Places of Profit, who can boldly qualifie themselves for their Offices by *all these Tests* you speak of; yea, I believe they could swallow a dozen more; but many of them are very prophane in their Lives, and abusive to the Kings Subjects, though they eat the Kings Bread every day; and many others that are better Subjects, cannot have Employment, because they are not qualified as aforesaid.

Citt. The Affairs of his Majesty are very great, and there be many things hid from his Princely Knowledge; which would be soon rectified, if he had a true itare of Affairs; for he is resolved to promote and maintain the Welfare of all his faithful Subjects.

Countr. Seeing we have gone thus far, let it not be grievous that I desire your Company and Discourse a little longer; and I pray you be as plain and full upon the next point as you can, *viz.* the *Parliamentary Test*, which is to be taken before the Elected Members do enter the Parliament-House, so as to sit and act as Parliament-Men: I press this the more, because the Clergy and many of the Gentry, influence the Commons against the Repeal of that *Test*: There is a kind of *Heartiness* to part with the *Penal Laws*; but this *Parliament-Test* seems to be like parting with their *Hearts Blood*; now I intreat you be free with me about it.

Citt. My good Friend, I will most heartily impart my Mind unto you about this matter; and that it may be the better remembred, I will present some Particulars about the *Parliamentary-Test* to your Consideration that you may reason the matter the better among your Friends and Neighbours about you.

1. Consider that the *Test* for *Parliament*, is but of Humane Invention, and not of Divine Institution; and therefore no Divine Rule will be broken if it be Repealed.

2. Consider, that as it was made by State-Policy, it may be Repealed by State-Policy; and I humbly conceive, that there is not the same Reason for continuing of it, as there was for making it: For at that time it was feared, That if a *Popish Successor* should come to the Crown, all sorts of *Protestants* would be utterly undone; but now we see God hath ordered matters so, that *James Duke of York* is now in his Rightful Throne; and instead of hurting any sorts of *Protestants*, he hath helped and will stretch forth the Hands of his Royal Power to help all sorts: O how many have perished in Gaol since the Restoration, by being squeezed to death by the Lion hands of *Penal Laws*, though King *Charles the Second* did several times endeavour to hinder it! But King *JAMES the Second* is thoroughly resolved to compleat the ease of all his People of all sorts, and I pray God prosper him in it.

3. Consider, that the *Test* aforesaid, setting aside the Policy in making of it, is a destroying the Birth-Right of *English men*, which was always a tender thing to all true *English Men*; and I reason the case thus: First, the *Parliamentary Test* destroyeth the Birth-right of those *Peers* that cannot take it, who are to sit in the House of *Peers* by Right of *Peerage*; and as some may be hindred by not taking the *Test*, so others may be hindred if they (as *Peers*) should scruple the Oath of *Allegiance* and *Supremacy*, though they could take the *Test*, as it may be the case of some scrupulous *Protestants*. Secondly, it is the Birth-right of the *Members* of the House of *Commons* to sit in *Parliament*, being fairly Elected by *Free-holders*, for *Knights* of the *Shires*, or by the several *Boroughs* and *Corporations* to serve as *Burgesses*: and therefore to have the *Test*, or any other thing, imposed to hinder their sitting, after being fairly chosen, is a destroying of the Birth-right of *English men*. Now I appeal to the *Ingenuity*, *Reason*, and *Conscience* of all sorts of my *Fellow-Subjects*, whether they would not affirm the same thing I have done, if the same *Extremity* lay upon themselves from those that differ from them, of any one *Party*: And to make the matter yet more plain, suppose there should be a *Presbyterian* *Parliament*, that should make a Law that no *Anabaptist*, no *Independant*, nor no *Quaker* should be in a capacity to sit in *Parliament*, though the People be never so free to chuse them, except each person of each *Perswasion* would renounce his particular *Opinions* about *Religion*: And suppose some of all these *Parties* should be in *Parliament*, and agree together, so as to make a Law, That no *Church-of-England-man* should be in *Office*, or sit in *Parliament*, except he would renounce *Common-Prayer* and the *Sacrament*, as it is now among them; would not any of these *Proceedings* be adjudged a destroying the Birth-right of *English men*? But I hope in God there never will be such *Proceedings* from

from the Parties before-mentioned, nor from the *Roman Catholicks*; and it seemeth a very unreasonable thing, that the King should be imposed upon, not to have the Service of all sorts of his Subjects for the publick Welfare of the Kingdom; especially considering, that if all sorts of Subjects differing in matters of Religion, were used, each Party would be striving who should be most careful and faithful in the Affairs of the Kingdom, they all being at ease about Religious Worship, as differing from each other.

Countr. Truly, I think this fair Reasoning; and this is very much wanted in the Country, for some do huff at a deadly rate, and persuade themselves and others, That if the *Test* be taken away, there cannot be such another Security for the publick Safety: And the conclusion is, That Popery will be the publick Worship of the Kingdom.

Citt. I do wonder at such kind of Notions, being persuaded, That those that do most insist upon this Theam, are great Opposers of Idols; and yet in this matter set up an Idol in humane Affairs for themselves, and bow down to it as their only Security: And besides all this, the management of such a Notion is a bad Reflection upon the Wildom of the three Estates of the Kingdom; as if every private Man could determine this difficult matter better than they: and therefore seeing we are now entred upon this point, let me pray you to consider a few things.

1. Consider, That in the next Parliament there will be a great number of the wise men of the Church of England in the House of Commons, and some Protestant Dissenters.

2. Consider, That in the House of Peers there is a great number of Protestant Lords, besides the Protestant Bishops; and they are all concerned to look after a good Security in lieu of the Test.

3. Consider, That his Majesty, though differing in Religion from them all, hath most Graciously lead them the way, that at the same time that Penal Laws are Repealed, that so Persecution may be destroyed, then Liberty of Conscience to his differing Subjects to be established, and the Church of England be confirmed by a new Magna Charta.

And therefore I do most humbly wish and heartily advise, that all sorts of his Majesties Subjects would lay by bitter Contention, and come to an Union of Mind, to use their utmost endeavours to Chuse such a House of Commons as may with the Lords and the King, accomplish this glorious Design; for I am persuaded, that the only Design of his Majesty, after coming to the Crown with so much difficulty, is that he may live in Tranquility, dye in Peace, and leave all sorts of his Subjects without having a Power to hurt each other, when it may be out of his own Power to help such a divided People.

And then we shall have a Glorious Prospect, that whoever may be the Successour, will in all Probability follow his Majesties Gracious Footsteps. And in the mean time, I will pray, *Long Live and long Reign King JAMES the Second.*

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